

## Think About Revision

Maxine Hong Kingston is a noted contemporary author. Her recent books include *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* and *China Men*. In an interview for this project, she talked revision as a crucial part of the processes of writing.

## Transcript

"Well I tell my students that my books and stories and poems take at least 12 drafts. And the first draft is nothing, the first draft is incoherent, it's ungrammatical, it's messy, it's just a lump of mud, and it is sounds. They're not even sentences. They are just sounds. And I don't even know whether I have anything. And it doesn't take any kind of a shape until you can see a little bit more of a shape in the second draft, and it becomes more and more shapely, and takes more and more of a real form as you rewrite.

"There is an image in the I-Ching of a tower. And this tower has to do with creativity. And when you get to the top of the tower, then you can see, your perspective is very wide. You can see farther, and you can have more visions, than when you are at the bottom of the tower.

"And, so, I tell my students that at the first draft you are at the bottom of the tower. With every draft, you go higher and higher in the tower. When I was writing *The Woman Warrior*, when I got to the top of the tower, and then at that point it must have been the 12th draft, then I saw the *Woman Warrior* herself.

"I wrote the *Woman Warrior* section at the end of the story. It's not at the end of the story, it's in the middle of the story, but I didn't see that vision until I had gotten to the end, and I rewrote it over and over again.

"And you know, I would write about reality, about my various thoughts, about my mother and aunts, and all these real things. But I didn't have that vision of the mythic warrior who lived a thousand years ago in China. I saw her at the last draft. Then I wrote that, and then I put it in, in Chapter Two."